DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 034 450 FL 001 510

AUTHOR	Munoz, Olivia
TITLE	Songs in the Foreign Language Classroom. ERIC Focus Reports on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Number 12.
INSTITUTION	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, New York, N.Y.; Modern Language Association, New York, N.Y. ERIC Clearinghouse on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.
SPONS AGENCY	Modern Language Association of America, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	69
NOTE	10p.
AVAILABLE FROM	NLA/ACTFL Materials Center, 62 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10011 ($.25)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Enrichment, Classroom Materials, Cultural Enrichment, Educational Games, Fles, Folk Culture, *Language Instruction, Lesson Plans, Resource Materials, Secondary Schools, *Second Language Learning, *Singing, Student Attitudes, Teacher Attitudes, *Teaching Methods, *Teaching Techniques, Vocal Music

ABSTRACT

This study, one in a continuing series of concise reports each dealing with a problem in foreign language teaching and learning, discusses the teaching of songs in the foreign language classroom. Commentary on the cultural, esthetic, and academic value of singing introduces an enumerated series of general suggestions on teaching the song. Other material includes remarks to the "non-singing- teacher, reteaching the song, part singing, evaluation, the folk song, action songs and games, and the Christmas carol. A resource list furnishes addresses of sources for song books, recordings, and tapes. (RL)

ED034450

ERIC Focus Reports on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

A continuing series of concise papers each focusing attention on a current problem of foreign language teaching and learning.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Number 12

Songs in the Foreign Language Classroom

By Clivia Muñoz
Houston Public Schools

Editorial Advisor:
Joseph Michel
University of Texas, Austin

FL001510

ERIC FOCUS REPORTS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING are prepared and published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages with private funds provided by the Modern Language Association of America. The REPORTS are planned in cooperation with the MLA/ERIC Clearinghouse on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (62 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011) and are designed to supplement the information services of that Clearinghouse.

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Price: 25 cents

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SONGS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Singing in the foreign language should be a definite activity in today's classroom. It can be an enjoyable learning experience, used in varying degrees, from the elementary school to the university. By learning songs in the foreign language he is studying, the American student can benefit culturally, aesthetically, and academically. Songs in the foreign language are a natural medium of instruction. Not only do they represent the culture and character of a country and its people, but they provide learning opportunities in the more technical areas of language skills. Singing can assist in improving pronunciation, intonation, proper inflection, effective emphasis, and in the avoidance of monotonous, uninteresting expression. Thus, singing can be a vital part of language learning and should not be approached aimlessly.

There are numerous ways to teach a song. The success of a singing experience depends upon seizing and using to full advantage every mood or opportunity to have students participate. The wise and flexible teacher will adapt his preparation, his experience, and his understanding of teaching to the needs and interests of the boys and girls. The teacher is primarily a guide for making the activities as interesting and as exciting as the music itself permits. A common sense approach will be useful in selecting and leading a song.

General Suggestions

1. Organize the class so that the shy or more insecure singers are interspersed among the more outgoing or able singers. It is important to involve all the students in this activity.

2. Let the song do as much of the teaching as possible. Very little need be said about the song if it is obvious that students participate well and have an understanding of what they are singing.

3. Select records with which the students may sing along or to which students may listen in preparation for their singing. Avoid buying records with elaborate instrumentation.

4. Have the class stand while singing, particularly if most of the language activities have been conducted while sitting. This is an opportunity to stretch, to restore energy, or to get a "breath of air."

5. Select a high-quality binaural tape recorder for the music activities. Occasionally, for listening experiences, record selected singers or groups from the class.

6. Introduce new songs only when no other basic material is being presented for the first time.

7. Remember that various types of songs provide different emotional experiences.

8. Utilize good voices as group leaders. Allow the attention to focus on the leaders while you assist the group.

9. Teach the children to listen. Realize that it is an individual experience but that students can develop a facility for effective listening. Only a good listener can become an accurate speaker or singer.

10. Keep the mood of the song in mind. Thinking the song through will help in teaching it. Tempo is important. A lively song should not be spoiled by singing too slowly; a slow one should not be sung hurriedly and a fast one should not be done in an unreasonably loud voice.

11. Remark briefly about the song. Explain the title, a historical point, the origin of the melody or the story.

12. Suggest a mood, a temperament, or movement that appears to be characteristic of the song. If the song is "Cielito lindo" ask what movement seems natural; if it's "Chiapanecas," what does it suggest?

13. Repeat the songs in a variety of ways – sometimes, with only the boys singing; other times with just girls. At times the teacher can alternate with the students, or an able song leader can alternate with the class group.

14. Whenever the songs are sung on subsequent occasions or for assembly programs, expand interest by having the students use instruments, props and simple costumes (hats and sashes), or by assigning parts for dramatization.

15. In the elementary school grades, plan to sing one song during each class period. Use the song to stimulate interest whenever enthusiasm appears to decrease, possibly following a period of lengthy drill. A few minutes of song at the right time will restore pupil enthusiasm in class work.

16. After the singing, comment on it in the foreign language:

Très bien, mes amis.

Muy bien, jóvenes.

Comencemos de nuevo.

¿Qué les pareció?

17. Limit Christmas songs to a few carols. Start learning these carols early enough in the school year so that they can be used all through the holiday season.

Teaching a Rote Song

Teaching a song requires a brief, but thorough, preparation. The song may call for an introduction through pictures, illustrations, or a relevant object. Simple songs may require no more than a clarification of the vocabulary, as would be the case if "Le Petit Navire," "El Barquito," "Mi Chacra," or "Die Lorelei" were presented. The discussion may be only two or three statements telling what the song is about. In the case of "Die Lorelei," the teacher would want to tell of the huge rock in the Rhine River and the singing maiden; in the case of "Mi Chacra," references to a farm scene would be sufficient, and for the presentation of "Le Petit Navire," holding up a small sailboat would focus the students' attention on the main theme. A longer discussion may center on meaning and mood which can be interpreted through pictures and colors.

In teaching songs at the secondary school level, the preparations can be similar to that of the elementary grades. Sometimes the teacher may extend the explanation of the song. If the class is doing "Heidenroslein," he can talk about the poem by Germany's great writer, Goethe. If he decides on a song like "Adelita" or "Valentina," he will want to relate it to Mexico's historical revolution. The discussion can be brief, yet stimulating enough to interest students in the worthiness of the activity they're about to undertake and should be designed as a motivational force.

After the discussion is completed, have the class listen to the complete song. You may want to sing it yourself or to have the class listen to a record or a tape. Then, present for repetition the individual verses or basic lines. Have the class repeat in unison, then by rows, and follow with a spot check of individual students on correctness of pronunciation.

In cases where the students have no difficulty with proper pronunciation, a quick repetition of the basic lines may be all that is needed before singing the song. Chant the words in rhythm and have the class sing along. If there appears to be

hesitation, have the class hum the melody. Then, chant the words in rhythm with the class. Play the record again and allow the class to listen to it in its entirety. Then lead them in singing, encouraging participation from the entire group. If you prefer, designate an able student leader who enjoys singing to direct the song for you.

Initially, follow this procedure:

Sing first phrase or verse – "Listen"
Class repeats – "Sing"
Sing phrase or verse 2 – "Listen"
Class repeats – "Sing"
Sing phrases 1 and 2 – class repeats
Repeat procedure for phrases 3 and 4
Combine phrases 3 and 4 – class repeats
Sing entire song – class repeats

Correct any errors in words, time, or pitch by calling immediate attention to the problem and drilling on it.

Remember to guide pitch by hand if large skips occur, or illustrate with lines drawn on the board. Help sustain rhythm by clapping hands or snapping fingers at difficult points.

A Note to the "Non-Singer" Teacher

The teacher who is a "non-singer" needs to realize that all teachers are not equally skilled at remedial reading, fundamental mathematics, or teaching songs, but the opportunity for singing can still be provided. The "non-singer" may want to make more frequent use of records and able students as the song leaders. The record can be used two or three times in the initial learning stages. The teacher should mouth the words while the boys and girls do the singing. When the class sings with the record, the singing may be soft. When it is done without the record, the group should be encouraged to sing reasonably louder. When a student leader conducts the singing, the teacher may want to circulate about the classroom and encourage participation.

Re-Teaching or Reviewing the Song

During another class session, you will want to either play the record once through or sing the song yourself. Have the class listen to it first, then encourage them to sing. You may want to join in, singing softly. At a later time, you may simply want to listen in order to evaluate their progress.

Provide opportunities for singing the song in a variety of ways. On occasion you may want the boys to sing one part and the girls another; the song leader and the class may alternate, or two groups of youngsters may want to present their separate versions.

In the more advanced grades, boys and girls can keep their song sheets or books before them as they listen to a song. The exception to this should be the initial presentation when students should give their undivided attention to your introduction to the melody and lyrics. Also, it may be necessary to read the words aloud for clarification of the meaning and for accuracy of pronunciation.

For variety as well as to enhance the presentation of the song, an overhead projector may be used. Be careful to write legibly and in large characters so that youngsters on all sides of the room have no difficulty reading the words. You may want to prepare transparencies which will be readily available for class use at any time. The advantage with the transparency is that the words of the song can be permanently printed. Also, a talented student can be asked to illustrate it, thereby providing an additional incentive to this student as well as to others who respond to artistic visual aids.

Part-Singing

Most children can successfully handle part-singing. The younger children can do two-part rounds using rote songs or simple songs. Older boys and girls are able to learn songs with more verses requiring greater memory work. However, it is not always necessary for the entire class to sing the songs together. Selected groups may be assigned to do the singing, with different groups allowed to sing at intervals. These groups can be periodically disbanded and new ones formed to involve all class members and revive enthusiasm.

No one part of a song is to be considered more important than others. Particularly with the younger boys and girls, the beginning tones should be checked for accuracy as they are very important in doing the rounds. It may be necessary to reestablish correct pitch when beginning each new round. It is important to maintain an attitude of enjoyment toward songs done in rounds. They can give lasting

satisfaction if they are considered "fun." Among the songs to do in rounds at any level are "Meister Jacob," "Frère Jacques," "Di Juanito," "Le Petit Navire," or "El Barquito."

Evaluation

The following questions will be useful in determining the degree of success attained in classroom singing:

1. Do children know by memory a variety of songs suitable for use in classroom, school assembly, home, and community?

2. Do they sing these songs with feeling?

3. Do the boys and girls in the group enjoy singing?

4. Are boys and girls taught to sing with an awareness of the mood or spirit of the different songs?

5. Do they show some creative imagination when interpreting new songs?

6. Can the words of the song be understood as the children sing?

7. Are opportunities provided to have children use song leadership?

The Folk Song

On the secondary school and university levels, beyond the first year, the folk song becomes a valuable and readily available source of cultural material. Each language teacher may select from among his favorite ones. The procedure to follow in the presentation of the song will be similar to that of teaching a song by rote. The motivation for learning the folk song is provided by the teacher's brief exposition of the content of the song.

The teacher of German may want to select "Du, du liegst mir im Herzen" (a wish for love from a loved one), which is probably Germany's most famous love song, or "Muss I denn" (the popular folk song about a young man leaving for the military service).

The Spanish teacher may select from a wealth of regional songs from Mexico, Spain, or any of the countries in Central and South America. The songs may

represent a wide range in theme and tempo: "corridos" from Mexico, "rancheras" of the Chileans, or "cielitos" from Argentina. There is always a message in these songs. Also, it would be helpful to explain briefly the actual interpretation that is made of these songs in the authentic Hispanic setting. Such songs are used extensively at gatherings in cafes, at fiestas, or picnics. Often the ballad or "coplas" can be presented in dialogue or dramatized versions. The more creative moments allow the singers to freely compose and sing their original verses. The songs may also be performed with dancing and guitar accompaniment.

The French have numerous favorites: "Sur le pont d'Avignon," "Chevaliers de la Table Ronde" and "D'où viens-tu, bergère?"

Action Songs and Game Songs

There are a few songs that are still commonly associated with folk games although games of this type are being replaced rapidly by competitive sports and television. Among the well-known ones are "la Víbora de la Mar" which is the counterpart of "London Bridge is Falling Down," "La rueda de San Miguel" which is like "Ring-around-a-Rosie," and "La vieja Inés" which focuses attention on colors.

Certain action songs may be used in the early elementary grades to enliven songfests, particularly animal songs that permit active expression. Other songs may encourage miming to illustrate the content. "San Serini" and "Il etait un' Bergère," present opportunities for using the hands to portray action. The motions usually have no rhythmic relationship, but will add interest to any song that lends itself to dramatization. Actions may successfully accompany these songs in the first through fourth grades.

The Christmas Carol

An interesting program based on Christmas carols can be very effective in the foreign language class; they are usually well received and the pupils will enjoy enlarging their repertoire. Students are often surprised to discover familiar carols in another language. They are delighted to learn that caroling originated through the Christmas ceremony and that it centers around the "crèche." They are impressed with the fact that "The March of the Three Kings" is over seven hundred years old.

The French Noëls are usually bright and lively and relatively easy to learn. Among the favorites are "Il est né le divin enfant" and "Minuit Chrètien." The Spanish teacher has an opportunity to present the "villancicos" and "las posadas" in addition to the Spanish counterparts to the traditional English carols. The German

teacher can delight his students by having them learn "O, Tannenbaum, O, Tannenbaum" and "Stille Nacht."

Resources

Convenient lists and evaluations of books of songs and discs and tapes of songs which were commercially available in 1962 appear in the MLA Selective List of Materials for Use by Teachers of Modern Foreign Languages in Elementary and Secondary Schools, edited by Mary J. Ollmann, 1962, 168 pp., $1.50 (Order No. B20). Additional items are covered in 1964 Supplement for French and Italian to the MLA Selective List of Materials, 70 pp., $1.00 (Order No. B21), 1964 Supplement for Spanish and Portuguese to the MLA Selective List of Materials, 55 pp., $1.00 (Order No. B22), and 1964 Supplement for German, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, and Swedish to the MLA Selective List of Materials, 69 pp., $1.00 (Order No. B23). [These books may be purchased from Materials Center, MLA-ACTFL, 62 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011. Enclose payment in cash or check.]

However, many books and recordings of songs are constantly becoming available and the reader is advised to watch professional journals for advertisements. Following are the addresses of some publishing and distributing houses to which specific requests may be directed for current catalogues of recordings and books of songs:

Children's Music Center, Inc., 5373 West Pico Blvd., Los Angeles 90019

French and European Publications, Inc., 610 Fifth Ave., New York 10020

Gessler Publishing Co., 110 E. 23 Street, New York 10010

Goldsmith Music Shop, Inc., 401 W. 42 St., New York 10036

Lorraine Music Co., Box 4131, Long Island City, N.Y. 11104

Mills Music, Inc., 1619 Broadway, New York 10019

Monitor Recordings, 156 Fifth Ave., New York 10010

Pan American Union, Sales and Promotion Division, Washington, D.C. 20006

Mary S. Rosenberg, 100 W. 72 St., New York 10023

Society for French American Cultural Services and Educational Aids, 972 Fifth Avenue, New York 10021

Spanish Music Center, Inc., Belvedere Hotel, New York 10036

Thrift Press, P.O. Box 85, Ithaca, N.Y. 14851

Wible Language Institute, 24 South 8 St., Allentown, Pa. 18105